

Engaging the Public

Figure This! Public Engagement Initiative

Goal: To provide a set of mathematics problems that can be used by middle school students and their families at home to explore real issues.

Summary:

This initiative, initially funded by the National Science Foundation and the U. S. Department of Education, is built around a set of 80 challenges, or mathematics problems, and is designed to be used by families and their middle school children. The challenges are available on the Web at www.figurethis.org or through www.nctm.org. In addition to the challenges, there are presentation packages for use with families, including a video. The packages were designed for use by schools because our research revealed that families were more likely to use the materials if they were recommended by teachers. Over 80,000 copies of a CD with this material have been distributed in the past year.

Purpose:

Having families comfortable with the mathematics that their children are learning in school provides the students with a positive environment at home. To help the parents become comfortable with the mathematics and the school, they will find questions that might be asked of their children's teachers and recommended books that contain some mathematics but that could be read with children.

Accomplishments/ Results:

To date, these materials have reached over 100,000 people with either print copies or CD copies. In addition, approximately 4,000 people per day visit the Web site with these materials. An additional feature of the Web site has been that users could send messages about the site or ask questions that would receive an answer within a day. Over 98% of the responses over a 3-year period have been positive. The biggest single request is for more materials of this type to be written for very young children.

Plans for the Next 12 Months:

This site will be kept active for at least the next 12 months. Plans are being explored to market the material on a CD. In addition, plans have been discussed with NSF for submission of a grant proposal to develop similar materials for young children. One big difference is that the materials for young children would be written in the form of storybooks that could be read by the families. These materials would initially be distributed in health care facilities serving disadvantaged families. The Web site would be expanded to house the new material.